

Exports at heart of fish farm expansion

■ Brad Thompson

Perth-based Marine Produce Australia is closer to making an export splash with barramundi from Cone Bay after having its production capacity more than doubled.

The State Government has granted MPA the right to increase production capacity in the Kimberley Aquaculture Development Zone to 15,000 tonnes a year.

Chairman Miles Kennedy said the increase would give MPA the scale needed to develop export markets.

"This is a slow process simply because the fish take two years to grow," he said. "It will take us a number of years to get to that capacity."

MPA estimates it is carrying 1.5 million barramundi in its sea cages after investing about \$100 million over the past decade. It sold 244t for revenue of \$2.55 million in the six months to December 31.

Mr Kennedy said MPA had decided to reduce sales in 2015-16 because it wanted to increase the average size of its fish. It is aiming to sell fish at about 4kg, up from 3kg.

"You just get a better yield and

better fillet size from 4kg fish," he said.

It takes about three days for Cone Bay barramundi to be trucked to Sydney on an ice slurry.

Mr Kennedy said there was talk of a regular shipping service from Derby that would see the fish land in Singapore in a similar timeframe. Air freight and onshore processing were other export options.

The increase in production capacity means MPA's lease in the KADZ increases from 700ha to 15,000ha.

MPA shareholder John Hutton backed a rival bid for the production capacity from three groups of traditional owners.

Mr Hutton said it was disappointing that the Aarli Mayi Project would not get the 10,000t capacity it wanted to farm fin fish in the KADZ.

He said Aarli Mayi might be awarded the 5000t of capacity that remained unallocated, but to his knowledge the project was still under assessment by the Department of Fisheries.

Mr Hutton, whose family company Maxima would have a 25 per cent share of the Aarli Mayi operating company, said the traditional owners could look beyond Cone Bay to other parts of the Buccaneer Archipelago.



Growth industry: MPA's sea cages which house barramundi at Cone Bay. Picture: Danella Bevis